Autotheory at work:

Reflections on the documentary film This is a Story about Self-Love (and Boobs)

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Abstract

This is a Story About Self-Love (and boobs) is a participatory short documentary that explores the objectification of women in Brazil, emphasizing the individual experiences of Brazilian women and the many nuances behind poor body image. In this 20-minute film, I aim to share my experiences with objectification and the resulting body image issues, reflecting upon how Brazilian women perceive and navigate their bodies within these societal stereotypes. Through my process of undergoing a breast reduction and lift as an attempt to feel better about myself, I explore the nuanced socio-cultural aspects of body image and the psychological effects of these pressures. Additionally, by employing autoethnography, autotheory, phenomenology, and objectification theory in this paper, I aim to provide a critical examination of societal beauty standards in Brazil and their potential effects on women. These methodologies facilitate a detailed understanding of aesthetic pressures and a reflexive analysis of my own experiences within this cultural context. By integrating personal storytelling and interviews with significant figures in my life, I aim to uncover the forces shaping women's perceptions of their bodies and the ways we navigate both external and internal pressures.

Acknowledgments

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I - Introduction

This film and accompanying research are neither an argument for or against plastic surgery. Nor does it propose solutions to body image issues and the overwhelming objectification problems that women constantly face. “This is A Story About Self-Love (and Boobs)” is a personal exploration of the effects of the hyper-sexualization and fetishization of the female body in Brazil. In this 20-minute autoethnographic short documentary, I reflect on the effects of the objectification of Brazilian women on an individual level, with emphasis on how Brazilian women see their own bodies, present themselves, and adapt to navigate their lives given the objectifying stereotypes established within Brazilian culture.

In this extremely personal film directed at teenage girls and young women, I dive into my own self-love journey by going through a breast reduction and lift. Simultaneously, I put this process under rigorous analysis within my research, attempting to find my body satisfaction while navigating through the nuanced sociocultural aspects of body image to understand the potential psychological effects of those pressures. Considering this, I desire to share an analysis and retelling of my process of navigating self-image issues throughout my life and highlight the complexities surrounding women’s bodies and our perceptions of ourselves reflected through my own experiences.

II - Content

Body Image and Growing Up

I was five years old when I learned my body was wrong. I was at school, practicing for a dance presentation and all of my classmates were sitting down in circles on the soccer field. I remember looking across the circle and a group of "cool kids" were laughing and looking at me. I then heard one of the kids whisper to the others "Gordolina." It took me a while to understand what was happening but then it hit me: they were calling me fat. I did not give much attention to how my body looked before that. After all, I was five and had other things to worry about. However, the shame I felt that day crushed me so much that I don't remember feeling comfortable in my skin ever again. I went home crying that day, feeling humiliated, helpless, and angry, but not at those kids. I was angry at myself for being "fat." At the time, I didn't know what was wrong with being fat, but I immediately understood that it was something I should avoid at all costs.

Meanwhile, being the only girl in my family growing up had its perks. Being the "princess of the family" put me on a sort of pedestal when compared to my brother and cousins, and while I won't deny that being pampered and receiving special treatment felt good at the time, I soon realized that being put in that position also meant that I was now something to be looked at, such as a sculpture on display, having to look clean and polished at all times. With the title also came the need to perform in certain ways and fit a box that I didn't see my male counterparts being forced into. Learning to act and look "ladylike" quickly became frustrating as I'd see my brother and cousins playing in the garage and not having to worry about their appearance or the way they behaved. There were no comments about their thick thighs, how they sat down with their legs spread up, or even complaints about the occasional swearing. Why did

people make those comments about me then? To protect myself from unsolicited "advice," I quickly learned to anticipate them and put myself under scrutiny before other people had a chance to do so. Of the many lessons I learned, the importance of being beautiful was perhaps the most important one. In a country where being pretty is a prerequisite for female survival, I couldn't help but feel the pressure of holding myself to those expectations from an early age. As I grew older, I began to realize how these expectations were not just confined to my family but were deeply rooted in Brazilian culture, history, and media. Brazil, known for its celebration of beauty and sensuality, often portrays a particular and sexualized image of female beauty in its popular media. This ideal, traditionally known as the "guitar-shaped body" consists of large breasts, a thin waist, and large hips/butt. It dominates television, magazines, and social media platforms, creating a powerful and pervasive beauty standard that is often unattainable. As a young girl, I found myself constantly comparing my looks to those celebrated standards, striving to mirror that idealized form of beauty so I would not feel looked at, or judged for not looking "right".

This struggle, however, was not exclusive to me. Body image concerns among children and adolescents have been under psychological analysis for a while and there is a significant amount of research indicating that although adolescence is often referred to as the time in which body image issues emerge, it is likely that the foundations for poor body image have been laid much earlier.[1]

> In their comprehensive review, Smolak and Levine (2001) proposed a detailed model of the development of body image in children. Peer and parental comments are proposed to interact with gender, BMI, and autonomy to lead to a focus on weight and shape. Thus,

[1] Levina Clark and Marika Tiggemann, "Sociocultural and Individual Psychological Predictors of Body Image in Young Girls: A Prospective Study.," *Developmental Psychology* 44, no. 4 (2008): 1124–34, https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.44.4.1124, 1124.

> some children (older and heavier girls in particular) are more likely to hear comments about weight and shape in their environment. Those with low autonomy, for whom it is particularly important to be well liked, are more likely to place importance on weight and shape in response to such messages.[2]

Simultaneously, physical beauty, much like samba and soccer, is often stereotypically associated with Brazil. This tropicalist fantasy cherished by Northerners, as Alexander Edmonds puts it, has been a recurring theme over five centuries of Brazilian history and is no news to us Brazilians. "From the accounts of Portuguese sailors describing the passionate indigenous people they encountered,"[3] to the promotional materials with women in bikinis released by the government to attract foreign tourists[4], to beer commercials overemphasizing the "guitar-shaped ideal,"[5] being "beautiful" by fitting the "standards" has become almost a prerequisite for being Brazilian. So much so that recently, while engaging in small talk with an Uber driver about our countries of origin, he let out a "But you don't look Brazilian!" I now regret not asking him what his conception of a Brazilian woman was but at the time, I was so caught off-guard by his comment that my only reaction was to dismiss it with an awkward laugh and comment on how pale I was from living in Canada.

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Alexander Edmonds, "'The Poor Have the Right to Be Beautiful': Cosmetic Surgery in Neoliberal Brazil," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 2 (May 15, 2007): 363–81, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00427.x, 371.
[4] Flávia Mantovani, "No Passado, Brasil JÁ Teve Material Oficial de Turismo Com Apelo Sexual," Turismo e Viagem, February 27, 2014, https://g1.globo.com/turismo-e-viagem/noticia/2014/02/no-passado-brasil-ja-teve-material-oficial-de-turismo-com-apelo-sexual.html.
[5]Giovanna Gradella and Luiza Luiza Risso, "Objetificação Da Mulher Na Propaganda Da Itaipava," Medium, June 27, 2021, https://medium.com/comunicacaoinclusiva/objetifica%C3%A7%C3%A3o-da-mulher-na-propaganda-da-itaipava-531b0d1f6110.

Growing up in a culture that constantly objectifies women was not an easy task when it came to dealing with my self-image. Being a young girl attempting to navigate her insecurities and body image issues in a country that puts beauty above so many things and has such high expectations for women's appearances, all while receiving negative comments from my own family and peers, can be very confusing at times. Some studies support the correlation between sociocultural factors and body image in children and adolescents. "For example, Smolak, Levine, and Schermer (1999) found that parents' direct comments about their child's weight were significantly related to body esteem in their sample of fourth- and fifth-grade children… Poor body image in children has (also) been associated with teasing by peers."[6] Considering this, being called fat by classmates and hearing from a parental figure more than once that "if you eat too much nobody will love you" can for sure have a few negative impacts on one's perception of themselves. To me, those words coming from my dad with such blatant honesty at the lunch table meant that he wouldn't love me if I were fat. But if I already considered myself fat, did that mean that my dad didn't love me, then? Hearing that was harsh and hurt quite a bit, especially considering that he is a "big guy" himself, as he often jokes. For a while, I thought of him as the main source of my insecurities and saw him as a hypocrite for saying such things.

On top of navigating the pressures coming from my interpersonal relationships, the 2000s were marked by the rise of social media, and with that, the aesthetic pressures intensified. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and later, Snapchat, created environments where constant comparisons and the showcasing of idealized versions of beauty became the norm. The omnipresence of edited photos, beauty influencers, and viral trends set unrealistic beauty standards that significantly heightened the pressure of needing to have the perfect body:

[6] Clark and Tiggemann, 1125.

> Women and girls report spending a great deal of time and energy on the selection, filtering and editing of the photographs they post of themselves ('selfies'), striving to put forward their 'best' self (Bij de Vaate et al., 2018; Chua & Chang, 2016). As a result, although many images are ostensibly of peers (rather than models as in fashion magazines), Instagram ends up presenting unrealistic ideals for women and girls. In support, a growing body of experimental research has now demonstrated that acute exposure (10–15 mins) to such idealized Instagram imagery results in increased body dissatisfaction relative to control images (e.g., Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Cohen et al., 2019; Dignard & Jarry, 2021; Prichard et al., 2020; Tiggemann et al., 2018).[7]

This digital landscape perpetuated a culture where appearances were continuously scrutinized, making it increasingly challenging to resist the urge to modify one's appearance to meet these pervasive and often unattainable ideals. Scholars who study the effects of body image on women have been conducting studies over the years in attempts to better understand the relationship between social media and body dissatisfaction. A 2015 study conducted by psychology researchers Adriana M. Manago, L. Monique Ward, Kristi M. Lemm, Lauren Reed, and Rita Seabrook[8] concluded that Facebook use was related to greater objectified body consciousness, which was in turn found to predict greater body shame. "In accord with sociocultural and objectification theories, these results suggest that spending more time on Facebook is linked to

[7] Ivanka Prichard, Brydie Taylor, and Marika Tiggemann, "Comparing and Self-Objectifying: The Effect of Sexualized Imagery Posted by Instagram Influencers on Women's Body Image," *Body Image* 46 (September 2023): 347–55, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2023.07.002, 347.
[8] Adriana M. Manago et al., "Facebook Involvement, Objectified Body Consciousness, Body Shame, and Sexual Assertiveness in College Women and Men," *Sex Roles* 72, no. 1–2 (December 12, 2014): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0441-1.

body dissatisfaction among women at least partly due to the internalization of unrealistic ideals, self-objectification, appearance comparison, and self-surveillance."[9]

That was precisely what I found myself going through during my adolescence. While dealing with the insecurities that going through puberty brings, on top of my previous issues regarding my body, being active on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook heightened my self-surveillance and contributed to even worse body image, which ultimately led to issues such as disordered eating, body dysmorphia, and excessive dieting. On the other hand, because I did not feel comfortable sharing my dissatisfaction with my body with my parents or peers, I began to look for other women who were going through similar issues and sharing their experiences through social media.

Emphasizing self-love and accepting one's body as it is, the body positivity movement emerged as a response to the promotion of the thin or thin-muscular ideal prevalent on social media. Stemming from the fat acceptance movement of the 1960s and significantly influenced by Black activists, the campaign seeks to encourage individuals to love and respect their bodies regardless of weight, shape, skin tone, or disabilities. It aims to foster a cultural shift towards greater acceptance and appreciation of diverse body types.[10] Considering this, the assurance that bodies like mine were worthy of love, which contradicted my dad's earlier statements was liberating. I felt as if I could finally have an opportunity to give myself a break and be at ease within my skin, encouraging me to embark on my long-lasting search for self-love. However, although I learned a lot from the body positivity movement and owe a great deal to it when it

[9]Jasmine Fardouly et al., "Social Comparisons on Social Media: The Impact of Facebook on Young Women's Body Image Concerns and Mood," *Body Image* 13 (March 2015): 38–45, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.12.002, 106.

[10] Gritt Ladwig et al., "Risks and Benefits of Social Media Trends: The Influence of 'Fitspiration', 'Body Positivity', and Text-Based 'Body Neutrality' on Body Dissatisfaction and Affect in Women with and without Eating Disorders," *Body Image* 50 (September 2024): 101749, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2024.101749, 2.

comes to the development of nearly my entire body of work as a filmmaker and visual artist, I was still comparing myself to the beauty ideals of my country and fighting my self-objectification despite all of my efforts to follow the steps of the body positive influencers I looked up to.

Objectification Theory and Body Dissatisfaction

First proposed by Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts in 1997, objectification theory "places female bodies in a sociocultural context to understand the lived experiences and mental health risks of girls and women who encounter sexual objectification."[11] According to Fredrickson and Roberts, sexual objectification happens when a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are isolated from her whole person and treated as mere instruments. That reduces women to bodies, primarily seen for the use and pleasure of others. Because women cannot control this objectifying gaze, it is difficult for them to entirely avoid situations where they might be objectified.[12] This is no news to women. Objectification is present in our daily lives through visual media, advertisements, and even through interpersonal relationships and social encounters. However, "distinct from attempts to uncover why objectification occurs, objectification theory takes as a given that women exist in a culture in which their bodies are for whatever reasons looked at, evaluated, and always potentially objectified."[13] Considering this, objectification theory proposes that in a culture where female bodies are frequently objectified and valued for their appearance, such as in Brazil, women and girls come to view themselves

[11] Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (June 1997): 173–206, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x, 174.
[12] Ibid, 175-176.
[13] Ibid, 177.

through an external perspective, often leading to self-objectification. This internalization can result in heightened body surveillance, increased body shame, and anxiety about physical appearance, which in turn can have negative impacts on mental health, such as depression and eating disorders.[14]

When put in contrast with my own experiences with body image growing up, objectification theory provides the missing links that allowed me to understand how societal expectations around body image affect women on a much deeper level, highlighting the role of patriarchal structures in shaping individual and collective perceptions of beauty. Coming across objectification theory for the first time while developing my research was such an enlightening experience that I felt the need to discuss the original article by Fredrickson and Roberts with my therapist. It was as if everything I've been trying to understand about myself and my relationship with body image for so many years suddenly clicked.

Fredrickson and Roberts explain that given that a woman's social and economic opportunities can be influenced by her looks, it becomes important for women to be aware of how their appearance is perceived by others. Women often act as their own first critics. Because of this, what is commonly seen as narcissism or vanity, may actually be a strategy for managing how they are treated by others. This behaviour might not be a conscious choice but rather a result of socialization, where repeated exposure to societal pressures to enhance beauty makes these efforts seem natural or self-chosen.[15] Considering this, I felt stuck in a sort of existential tug-of-war. On one hand, I was pressured by my self-objectification and external factors because I wanted to feel good about myself and "make other people like me." Especially knowing that my sense of worth was tied to my appearance, the body-positive side of me was fighting these

[14] Barbara L. Fredrickson et al., "Bringing Back the Body," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (December 2011): 689–96, https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684311426690.
[15] Objectification Theory, 178-179.

pressures and telling me to love myself no matter what and that society shouldn't care about my weight or the way I look. That meant that no matter how much I tried to listen to body positivity, I'd still put my image under scrutiny because ultimately, conforming to the beauty standards proved itself more practical when it came to my interpersonal relationships as it meant that I would not be criticized as much. This conundrum deeply affected my mental health, as no matter how much I tried, I could not love myself, so it felt as if I was losing a battle against my own desire to be happy.

Objectification theory explains that "women, having less power than men to influence through action, often use the one thing they can manipulate—their bodies—as a means of influence."[16] Susie Orbach, for example, argues that being "fat is a way of saying 'no' to powerlessness and self-denial, to a limiting sexual expression which demands that females look and act a certain way, and to an image of womanhood that defines a specific social role."[17] Because I felt so powerless regarding the ownership of my own body, my way of resisting objectification and the beauty standards imposed on me was through using my appearance as a means of "resistance." Because the pressures inflicted upon me were mostly related to weight gain and consequently saggy breasts, declining the breast surgery offers and weight loss suggestions made by my parents, to me, meant that I was taking control of my body. It was not just a matter of being a rebellious teenager or a recently independent young adult going through an identity crisis, or the desire to fight against my family's unsolicited comments about my body and my own surveillance. It was a defence mechanism in an attempt to take control over my own body, especially since at that time, I saw my parents, specifically my father, as the embodiment of the body-shaming that was inflicted upon me from such an early age. At first, getting the

[16] Ibid, 191.
[17] Ibid.

surgery felt like losing a battle I had been fighting for a long time, and it was only after examining the effects of self-objectification — and months after getting the surgery — that I was able to fully comprehend the source and reason of my grief.

(And Boobs)

When talking about the objectification of women's bodies, everything seems to end in boobs. Jokes aside, it is undeniable that boobs are among the most consequential symbols of femaleness. "The breast as a cultural signifier is a contested site of political and personal significance in an ongoing dialogue deeply implicated in framing, challenging, and policing women and womanhood."[18] Historically, breasts have been sexualized due to a combination of biological, cultural, and media influences. While they are seen as indicators of fertility and femininity, culturally, breasts have been idealized and objectified, with their portrayal in media and advertising emphasizing sexual attractiveness and reinforcing gender norms and beauty standards. When referencing Janet Lee's work, Carla Rice points out that "breasts may be markers of sexuality and womanhood, but paradoxically they seldom are seen as belonging to women themselves. Rather, they tend to be regarded as the property of men and infants."[19] This illustrates how women's bodies are seen as fragmented objects rather than as parts of their own personhood. It highlights how breasts are appropriated for the sexual pleasure of men and the nurturing needs of infants, simultaneously stripping women of ownership and agency over their bodies. This reality is especially true in Brazil.

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[18] Carmen Webb, Natalie Jacox, and Claire Temple-Oberle, "The Making of Breasts: Navigating the Symbolism of Breasts in Women Facing Cancer," *Plastic Surgery* 27, no. 1 (October 21, 2018): 49–53, https://doi.org/10.1177/2292550318800500, 49.
[19] Carla Rice, essay, in *Becoming Women : The Embodied Self in Image Culture* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 186–233, 201.

My earliest memory of this is watching TV on Saturday afternoons and seeing young women participating in wet t-shirt contests (Gata Molhada) being shot with water guns by members of the audience (usually men) and celebrity guests to expose their breasts with the sole objective of finding the code for a chest containing a prize. TV shows and advertisements following similar ideas prevailed in Brazilian media for a long time and became a pop culture phenomenon from the late 90s to the late 2010s and are still relevant nowadays.[20] Given the effects of mass media on our overall perceptions of beauty supported by objectification theory, it's hard to believe that this sexualized depiction of women didn't affect our notions of our bodies. In fact, according to the most recent International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery survey on aesthetic and cosmetic procedures, Brazil occupies second place in the worldwide ranking of breast procedures performed in 2023, with 551,153 surgeries being done last year. Out of those numbers, 227,451 were breast augmentation procedures alone.[21]

A Note on Plastic Surgery

The ISAPS survey reveals that Brazil is the country with the most surgical procedures, with a total of 2,185,038 surgeries performed in 2023.[22] One of the main reasons for the high demand for plastic surgery in the country is the accessibility and normalization of aesthetic procedures. Brazil has a well-established cosmetic surgery industry, renowned for its expertise and relatively lower costs compared to many other countries. This accessibility has made plastic

[20] Gabriela Brito, "A Objetificação Do Corpo Feminino Não Se Limita Às Propagandas de Cerveja," Medium, July 21, 2020, https://medium.com/revista-brado/a-objetifica%C3%A7%C3%A3o-do-corpo-feminino-n%C3%A3o-se-limita-%C3%A0s-propagandas-de-cerveja-d218b0b52b17.

[21] "Global Survey 2023: Full Report and Press Releases," ISAPS, June 2024, https://www.isaps.org/discover/about-isaps/global-statistics/reports-and-press-releases/global-survey-2023-full-report-and-press-releases/, 16.

[22] Ibid, 7.

surgery a more attainable option for a broader segment of the population. Moreover, undergoing plastic surgery can also be seen as a symbol of status and luxury in the country, further enhancing the demand for these types of procedures.[23] The normalization of these procedures, partly due to their prevalence and acceptance in Brazilian culture, has reduced the stigma typically associated with cosmetic surgery, making it a more socially acceptable practice. Considering this, the banalization of plastic surgery in Brazil creates a cycle of constantly seeking but never achieving satisfaction with one's body that needs to be taken into account:

> In Brazil, many patients do aim to correct traits that they believe make them fall outside norms… While many patients say they undergo surgery to raise self-esteem, [women]… claim that after their operations, 'Men are hot for us more, they have more sexual appetite, *né*?' Surgeons are encountering more patients who 'have beautiful bodies but seek out multiple operations to achieve more perfect forms', as Dr. Luciana said. The redundant 'more perfect' suggests that for some *plástica* is not a one-time passage into normality, but a never-ending pursuit of incremental improvement.[24]

This relentless quest for perfection perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards and can lead to psychological harm, reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes and objectification by implying that a woman's worth is tied to her ability to attract sexual attention. The widespread acceptance and accessibility of plastic surgery in Brazil exacerbate these issues, creating a cycle where satisfaction with one's body is always just out of reach, driven by external validation rather than internal acceptance.

[23] Interview with Dr. Júlio Carlos Pereira, August 2023.
[24] Alexander Edmonds, p375.

Saying Yes to Surgery and the Documentary

I was at the beach with my mom on a morning a few days after New Year's in 2023. Once more, she brought up the possibility of me getting breast surgery. It could have been the "new year, new me" mode that people get into during the first two weeks of January before eventually falling back into the old habits and chaos of everyday life, but I allowed myself to entertain the idea instead of shutting my mom down and saying I was happy the way I was. My mom and I are very different women, and while I consider myself to be introspective and very much of an overthinker — which I now understand could have at least partially stemmed from my self-objectification and need to constantly surveil myself in an attempt to navigate the external gazes— she is much more objective when it comes to overcoming insecurities, hence her statement during one of our conversations in the documentary: "No one is perfect. But if there's something that bothers you, I think you should change it."[25] And the truth is that my breasts were bothering me despite my efforts to love them. In a way, this conversation with my mom made me take a step back to reflect on deserving and owning my happiness, the weight I put on other people's perceptions of who I am, as well as how I let those perceptions shape my view of myself. Although I was skeptical that the surgery would solve my problems and felt like I was giving into the beauty standards I've been trying to fight for so long, I didn't think my dissatisfaction with my body could get any worse if I were to get the surgery. Furthermore, my parents were willing to pay for it and my mom would help me throughout the entire recovery process, so finding myself in that position of privilege was encouraging and I ultimately agreed to the surgery.

[25] Interview with Rilzamar Bauer Gama, August 2023

Amongst many initial consultations, I was able to find a doctor who took an ethical approach to plastic surgery, which was an important factor for me. Dr. Júlio Carlos Pereira is a member of the Brazilian Society of Plastic Surgery (SBCP) and the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS) and specializes in reconstructive aesthetic procedures. During my interviews with him, we discussed concerns regarding the abuse of these often invasive aesthetic procedures and the nuanced role of plastic surgery in the politics of beauty and aesthetic pressure. Simultaneously, I was struggling with which direction to take on my Master's thesis. I knew I wanted to talk about aesthetic pressure and the sexualization of Brazilian women, but couldn't find a narrative within all of the concepts I wanted to cover. That was when I decided to point the camera towards myself — and my family — and look at my own experiences navigating self-love (and boobs). The documentary itself, as a short film, came from my desire to register my experiences in the hopes of sharing them with others in an accessible format and exposing how deeply rooted objectification and self-objectification have become in women's lives, as well as exploring how complicated navigating issues related to body image can be to young women such as me.

III - Documentary Relevance

References

Looking back, I realize that my "research" for this documentary began much earlier than my decision to pursue a Master's degree in Documentary Media. Most of my previous work surrounding body image and aesthetic pressure was heavily inspired by the content created by many of the body positivity influencers I followed on social media during my teenage years.

From turning the camera to myself and showing my body to having interviews in which I actively participate, those decisions have been heavily informed not only by the works of the many feminist artists and thinkers who came before me but also by women who actively "put themselves out there" by sharing their personal experiences and struggles with body image on social media intending to bring awareness to those issues on a larger scope. Lauren Fournier argues that "autotheory has been shaped on the one hand by the discursive shift toward affect and performativity and on the other by the shifting place of the personal in relation to social media technologies and the more widespread cultural tendency to overshare."[26] This means that platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have transformed how personal experiences are shared and perceived. They encourage individuals to share personal stories, often blending the private with the public. Considering this, there is a growing trend to disclose personal details more openly and frequently. This cultural shift has made personal narratives more prominent and accessible, influencing how people integrate their personal experiences with broader social and theoretical contexts.

This is precisely what the Brazilian digital influencer Luiza Junqueira, creator of the YouTube channel "Tá Querida," did almost ten years ago when I first came across her platforms. While browsing through YouTube as a teenager looking for "weight-loss tips" and "diets to make you lose weight fast," I saw a video entitled *Tour Pelo Meu Corpo* (Tour Through My Body).[27] I was intrigued by the novelty of it and decided to watch it. In the video, Luiza puts her own semi-naked body in front of the camera, and while showing each part of her body in fragmented close-up shots, she makes comments about each body part, as if they were rooms in the place she

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[26] Fournier, Lauren. Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism (p. 16). MIT Press. Kindle Edition.
[27] Luiza Junqueira, "Tour Pelo Meu Corpo," YouTube, October 31, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDpHE2U4PEk.

calls home. It was the first time I saw a fat woman showing and talking about her insecurities and "flaws" in a compassionate way. She didn't hate herself and was open about the negative perceptions she had towards her body, but talked about those in such a forgiving way that made me feel at home with my own body for a while. What I found out years later, however, was that Luiza Junqueira had previously directed a documentary called *Gorda*[28] (2016) in which she interviewed three different women about their relationships with their bodies as well as how the external pressures inflicted on their appearance and weight affected them. In a subsequent video about her experiences during the process of making the documentary, she explains that the idea came from her own hate towards her body and need to feel better about herself, as well as her desire to understand how the pressures she faced derived from a larger societal context, one that the three participants in *Gorda* also speak to.[29]

Considering this, I argue that Luiza Junqueira's work has been the major source of inspiration for my documentary and overall journey of self-acceptance. Following Junqueira's steps, I turned the camera towards myself and did my own "tour through my body" during the early stages of my research. This step was fundamental to help me visualize and rationalize my insecurities, especially when it came to my breasts, which is reflected in the film through the tape sequence. Most importantly, her choice of putting her own body under analysis to find forgiveness and compassion towards herself was a powerful act of vulnerability and authenticity that resonated deeply with me throughout the years. By sharing her struggles and insecurities, Junqueira demonstrated that the process of self-exploration and self-acceptance could be a transformative experience, not only for herself but also for her audience. Her ability to embrace

[28] Luiza Junqueira, "Gorda (Filme Completo)," YouTube, November 21, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVozftI7Ebs&t=656s.
[29] Luiza Junqueira, "Sobre Meu Filme (e Meu Processo de Auto Aceitação) | TÁ, Querida!," YouTube, January 11, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OF1wyj07cjA&t=585s.

her imperfections and share them publicly provided me with a reference for how personal narratives can be used to challenge societal norms and promote body positivity. Furthermore, her documentary follows a similar format to the tour of her body, considering that as she engages in deep interviews with the participants, she gives them the autonomy to use the camera to show their bodies as they see themselves to foster healing opportunities.[30] This was fundamental to help me understand how aspects of "vlog-style" video formats can translate into the more traditional formats of documentary filmmaking and serve as a way of performing research when related to autotheory.

Another film that deeply influenced my process was the 2022 documentary *Explante: um novo olhar sobre nossos corpos*.[31] Directed by Ingrid Gerolimich, it dives into the physical and psychological impacts of breast implants. The film explores the growing movement of women opting to remove their silicone implants, known as explant surgery, due to health complications or a desire for greater self-acceptance. Gerolimich, who is also a sociologist and psychoanalyst, documents her personal experience with explant surgery and interviews other women who have undergone the procedure, as well as medical experts. The documentary raises critical questions about the societal pressures that drive women to undergo cosmetic surgeries and the often-overlooked health risks associated with such procedures.[32] By focusing on the psychological and emotional impact of explant surgery in addition to the physical aspects, *Explante* underscores the importance of both mental and physical health in discussions about body image, as well as shows the many nuances behind women's decisions to undergo plastic surgery, specifically when it comes to breast surgeries.

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ingrid Gerolimich, "Explante - O Filme," July 11, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUpsgdQQkuI.
[32] Renata Dourado, "Explante: O Filme Que Fala Sobre a Doença Do Silicone," Band Brasília, May 9, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiYwdVGlZu0.

Gerolimich's work was pivotal in my understanding of the complex interplay between societal expectations, personal health, and body image. It provides a comprehensive view of the motivations behind plastic surgery and the profound impact it can have on women's lives, both positively and negatively. By incorporating personal narratives and expert opinions, *Explante* presents a holistic perspective that is essential for anyone considering such a procedure. The documentary's emphasis on self-acceptance and the reclamation of one's body inspired me to critically examine my motivations and the broader cultural influences at play in my decision-making process regarding breast surgery. Moreover, *Explante* heavily informed my decision to show fragments of my surgery and record the whole process for my research, from my initial consultations with the doctor to the recovery process, even though some of these images did not make it into the final cut. Understanding and showing that plastic surgery is not a simple process, as Gerolimich argues, is a fundamental step in encouraging women to consider the risks and complexities behind this practice, especially considering how downplayed those are in Brazil.[33]

Another influential work, the documentary *Embrace* (2016),[34] is directed by body image activist Taryn Brumfitt and explores the global issue of body dissatisfaction among women. The film was inspired by Brumfitt's own journey with body image, which began when she posted an unconventional before-and-after photo on social media in 2013. This photo quickly went viral, sparking an international discussion about body image and self-acceptance. In the film, Brumfitt travels the world to interview various women, including notable figures like Mia Freedman, Amanda de Cadenet, and Ricki Lake. As in *Explante* and *Gorda*, the interviews in the film dive

[33] Ibid.
[34] "Embrace the Documentary," Body Image Movement, January 26, 2023, https://bodyimagemovement.com/embrace/embracethedocumentary/.

into personal stories of body loathing and the social pressures that contribute to these feelings. Most importantly, *Embrace* made me reflect on how media and cultural norms enforce unrealistic beauty standards that many women struggle to meet around the world. That helps me contextualize my work within a global scenario, as it showed me that those issues are not exclusive to my country. The focus that the film gives to the participant's family dynamics, with an emphasis on mother/daughter relationships was also an aspect that heavily influenced my work. After watching the documentary and seeing how aesthetic pressure issues are dealt with between generations, I was inspired to interview my mom and dad in an attempt to understand their perspectives on the subject and more specifically, to learn how my mom navigates her insecurities as well as how her ways of dealing with aesthetic pressure were passed on to me. Furthermore, the film made me reflect on the "before and after" pictures that people often share when going through weight-loss processes or plastic surgery, which was pivotal in my decision to not include the physical results of my surgery.

One aspect to be noted, however, is the fact that *Embrace* often takes a stance against plastic surgery, whereas *Explante* defends the need for making informed decisions and understanding the implications and pressures at play before choosing to go under the knife. While my documentary does not wholly reject the practice, I attempt to present a balanced view by highlighting both the potential benefits and the significant complexities involved in deciding on undergoing breast surgery, as well as showing how personal and nuanced making this decision can be, especially when these aspects are deeply influenced by one's family dynamics. By integrating insights from both *Explante* and *Embrace*, my goal was to explore a personal perspective on the intersection of body image, societal expectations, and personal health, encouraging a more informed and empathetic dialogue around these issues.

Why Me?

One of my biggest struggles while embarking on this search for "self-love" and ultimately making the decision to turn the camera towards myself for this documentary, has been dealing with impostor syndrome and self-doubt. Those issues accompanied me from the beginning of pre-production to the very end of the editing process. After all, why is my life so important that it should be worth turning into a film? What right do I have to put my own experiences in the forefront of an issue that affects so many women on so many levels and ways? Self-indulgence was a concern that constantly loomed over me throughout my process. The fear that sharing my story might come off as narcissistic or self-centred often paralyzed me. It took me a couple of therapy sessions to finally get past my fears and fully embrace the self-reflexive nature of my research.

Lauren Fournier speaks to this in her book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*:

> One of the most noticeable ways in which the autotheoretical turn is tied to histories of feminist practice is the simple fact that feminist artists continually face the charge of narcissism when they incorporate themselves in direct ways into their work (and feminists themselves are not immune from launching such critiques). One of the reasons why work by women and artists of color is particularly vulnerable to charges of narcissism is that women and racialized people have been historically overdetermined by their bodies—in contrast, always, to the supposedly neutral standard of the white, cisgender man.[35]

[35] Fournier, Lauren. *Autotheory As Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021. Accessed March 4, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, 42-43.

This highlights a critical tension within autotheory and feminist art practices. The integration of personal narrative and theoretical analysis challenges traditional academic norms and the intellectual authority of supposedly neutral, objective knowledge. By centring on personal experiences, particularly those of marginalized groups, autotheory exposes and critiques the biases inherent in these standards. Feminist and auto-theoretical works thus serve as a provocation[36], questioning the devaluation of the autobiographical and underscoring the legitimacy and importance of personal, embodied knowledge in academic and artistic contexts. By embracing autotheory, I aim to validate my personal experiences within a broader cultural and social framework. This method helps demonstrate that my journey with body image is part of a larger, systemic issue that affects many women.

[36] Ibid, 42.

IV - Methodology

A Personal Journey

As the director and main character of *This is a Story About Self-Love (and boobs)*, my journey forms the heart of my research and creative process. From childhood to adulthood, I've grappled with societal expectations and their impact on my body image, culminating in my decision to undergo breast reduction surgery and ultimately, my choice of sharing my experiences in a documentary. In this section, I explore the different methodologies used in the creation of both the research and the documentary itself. Drawing mainly from my experiences as a lens through which to explore broader themes of aesthetic pressure on women's bodies in Brazil, I dive into the specifics of each methodological approach employed, outlining the reasoning behind my choices, the procedures undertaken, and the ethical considerations that have influenced my work.

By intertwining my narrative with broader societal contexts provided by my research, I also aim to shed light on the intricate dynamics of Brazilian aesthetic standards and their influence on individual experiences. Considering this, through a blend of self-reflexive methodologies such as autotheory and autoethnography, paired with extensive use of qualitative research methods ranging from interviews to in-depth content analysis, I seek to develop a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding body image and beauty ideals in Brazil on an individual level. This personal yet analytical approach is developed through the lens of feminist theories, specifically objectification theory, and elements borrowed from phenomenology to form a framework that offers insights into the study of aesthetic pressure in Brazil.

Theoretical Framework

Central to my methodology is the utilization of autoethnography as a means of inquiry. By positioning myself as both researcher and subject, I attempt to embrace the subjectivity of my experiences while critically examining the cultural forces at play:

> When researchers write autoethnographies, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experiences. They accomplish this by first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice.[37]

Through reflexive writing, personal storytelling, and self-interrogation, my aim was to uncover how aesthetic pressure and Brazilian beauty ideals have shaped my perceptions and behaviours over time. Considering that body image and aesthetic pressure are deeply personal issues that affect individuals in unique ways, autoethnography allows me as a researcher to draw from my own lived experience with the topic, providing an insider's perspective on the emotional, psychological, and social impacts of Brazilian beauty standards. According to Leavy, autoethnography connects individual experiences to broader cultural contexts or phenomena, emphasizing the importance of the researcher's personal insights in cultural studies. It is particularly effective when the researcher has firsthand experience with the topic being examined

[37]Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 36, no. 4 (138) (2011): 273–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294. p274

and is willing to use these experiences as the foundation for their investigation.[38] Considering this, autoethnography is particularly well-suited to my approach to aesthetic pressure. In Brazil, where beauty standards are influenced by a complex mix of cultural and historical factors, using my own experiences can shed light on how these larger societal forces shape personal perceptions of body image. As a cis, bisexual, white woman, I am by no means arguing that my experiences are universal to all Brazilian women. I understand that I occupy a privileged position in the very nuanced economic and cultural landscapes that constitute Brazilian society. However, putting my personal experience and family dynamics under scrutiny through my research can still help uncover how cultural narratives around beauty are internalized, resisted, and negotiated by women, providing a bridge between personal experiences and broader social phenomena. Through a series of methods ranging from experimenting with self-recorded audio reflections and footage of myself to in-depth conversations with my parents, grandmother, and the doctor who performed my surgery, I aimed to explore and understand not only my relationship with my body but how Brazilian beauty standards relate to socio-cultural constructions in an attempt to develop an empathetic and critical exploration of how these pressures are lived and felt on an individual level in a Brazilian cultural context.

Similar to autoethnography, autotheory is part of the foundation of my analysis. However, while autoethnography focuses on the ethnographic significance of personal experience within cultural contexts, autotheory extends this exploration by explicitly incorporating theoretical frameworks into personal storytelling. The rise of autotheory is significantly influenced by the global feminist traditions in art, literature, criticism, and activism. The evolution of feminism can

[38] Patricia Lina Leavy, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2017), 144.

be seen as a progression of autotheory, consistently aiming to connect theoretical concepts with practical application while embracing principles such as "the personal is political."[39] "Most simply, autotheory refers to the integration of theory and philosophy with autobiography, the body, and other so-called personal and explicitly subjective modes. It is a term that describes a self-conscious way of engaging with theory…alongside lived experience and subjective embodiment."[40] Through autotheory, the researcher's personal experiences and theoretical analysis are intertwined, creating space for both self-exploration and academic research. By integrating personal narratives with theoretical investigation, the researcher is allowed to engage in a deep, reflective practice that requires them to critically examine their own experiences, assumptions, and biases. Feminist writer "Anna Poletti theorizes life narrative as performative (in the Butlerian sense)—as constituting that life through the act of writing—rather than as expressive (describing a life that exists prior to the act of writing about it)."[41] This act of writing — or reflecting upon and documenting — as life unfolds has been instrumental to my process while developing my work. Within my research, this framework facilitates a nuanced exploration of aesthetic pressure in Brazil through the lens of my own experiences, allowing me to make connections between the processes I am going through — such as the breast reduction surgery and the making of the documentary itself — and theoretical analysis drawn from objectification theory and phenomenology to analyze and interpret said experiences.

Objectification theory not only provided clarity in my analysis but also equipped me with a framework to critically assess and challenge these norms, fostering a greater sense of self-acceptance and resilience against external pressures. Applying objectification theory to the

[39] Fournier, Lauren. *Autotheory As Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021. Accessed March 4, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, 16
[40] Ibid, 13.
[41] Ibid, 16.

Brazilian socio-cultural context reveals specific dynamics shaped by my country's history, media representations, and cultural practices. Brazilian media, including television, magazines, and social media, for example, frequently showcase an idealized image of beauty that emphasizes slenderness and specific body types such as the “guitar-shaped” body. This constant exposure reinforces the objectification of women, making them feel pressured to conform to these ideals to gain social acceptance and opportunities. Understanding this theory has helped me situate my struggles with body image in this context. It has revealed that my need to constantly think about the external perceptions of my body is something that other women also experience in their daily lives. I felt as if my anxieties were not purely internal but were reflective of a broader cultural phenomenon. This insight has been liberating, as it allowed me to see that the challenges I faced were not simply personal failings but were influenced by pervasive societal norms.

Since the beginning of my research, the second-wave feminist idea of exploring the personal as political kept resurfacing, and it quickly turned into one of the most important ideas behind my work. Gaining traction in the late 1960s and early 1970s, this concept highlights the connection between individual experiences and larger social and political structures, emphasizing that personal issues often reflect broader systemic inequalities. It was popularized by feminist activists and scholars, including Carol Hanisch, whose 1970 essay *The Personal is Political* argued that personal experiences, particularly those related to gender roles and domestic life, were deeply intertwined with political oppression and needed to be addressed within the feminist movement. This idea challenged the traditional separation of private and public spheres, asserting that personal struggles, such as those related to domestic labour, reproductive rights, and body image, were inherently political and required collective action and societal change. As Hanisch recollects in the 2006 publication of her iconic essay, “critics of the feminist movements

of the time could sometimes admit that women were oppressed (but only by "the system") and said that we should have equal pay for equal work, and some other "rights." But they belittled us no end for trying to bring our so-called "personal problems" into the public arena—especially "all those body issues" like sex, appearance, and abortion."[42]

In the context of my work, the "personal as political" becomes a foundational element of exploration. This documentary is not just a personal journey of self-love and navigating societal expectations; it is also a reflection on the gendered nature of these pressures and the broader societal structures that perpetuate them. When discussing aesthetic pressure in Brazil, this political approach to personal subjects helps to illuminate how beauty standards are not merely individual preferences or choices, but are shaped by and reinforce patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist dynamics. Additionally, by foregrounding my personal experiences with body image and dissatisfaction with my body, the documentary highlights how such pressures reflect manifestations of broader gendered expectations and societal norms that privilege certain bodies over others.

On another note, phenomenology, focusing on the lived experience, offers an opportunity for understanding the deeply subjective and embodied nature of aesthetic pressure. As a methodological framework, it emphasizes the importance of the lived experience as the primary source of knowledge.

> Giorgi (1997) describes consciousness as a system of self, world, and body existing in correlation. Phenomenology is directed toward describing the consciousness of self with

[42] Carol Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political" *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* 1970, electronically published in January 2006 https://webhome.cs.uvic.ca/~mserra/AttachedFiles/PersonalPolitical.pdf, 1.

> the aim being to elicit essential understandings of the subjective meaning of human experience (Knaack, 1984), although not necessarily in an unbiased way. The bias is the researcher's self-reflective awareness, and the interactions of the researcher's own self with the self of the participant.[43]

The context of my documentary allows for an in-depth analysis of the subjective sensations, emotions, and perceptions that come with navigating the complexities of body image and aesthetic pressure in Brazil. This framework allows for a deep dive into the subjective experiences of individuals, specifically mine and my mother's, highlighting the emotional and psychological impacts of living up to and resisting these aesthetic norms. The focus on lived experience is crucial, as it highlights the embodied nature of aesthetic pressure. By adopting a phenomenological approach, my work seeks to capture the essence of what it feels like to live within a body that is constantly measured against societal standards of beauty. This lens allows me to dive into the sensory and emotional experiences associated with my body image journey, from the physical discomfort and psychological strain preceding my breast reduction surgery to the liberating sense of self-acceptance and empowerment that followed, not from conforming to the Brazilian beauty standards, but from beginning to understand my body and its importance as a means of resistance, even when choosing to go through with plastic surgery. The focus on embodiment and subjectivity is particularly resonant in discussions about aesthetic pressure, as it supports the fact that these pressures are not abstract societal constructs, but are experienced through the body and internalized by the self.

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[43] Bruce Bradfield, "Intersubjectivity and the Knowing of Inner Experience," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 53, no. 3 (December 28, 2012): 263–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167812469726, 271.

Through the integration of phenomenology with autotheory and autoethnography, my work not only narrates a personal journey of self-love and body acceptance but also critically examines the socio-cultural forces shaping our perceptions of beauty. By intertwining phenomenology with objectification theory and autotheory, my documentary positions the body as both the subject and object of analysis, exploring how societal norms are internalized and manifested physically and psychologically. This perspective invites viewers to turn to their own embodied experiences with body image, fostering a space for reflection on how those pressures are socially constructed and maintained. It offers a holistic and critical exploration of aesthetic pressure in Brazil by bridging the gap between personal narrative and theoretical analysis, providing a nuanced understanding of how body image and beauty ideals are experienced, negotiated, and resisted in everyday life.

Methods/Methodology

While developing my documentary within these frameworks, I have rigorously experimented with different research methods such as self-reflexive audio recordings and footage, in-depth analysis of popular media and family archives, scholarly research, and different formats of interviews. These have been useful not only as a way of gathering information but also as self-exploration exercises in which I was able to open up and find the most effective ways of telling my story. The use of self-reflexive audio recordings and personal footage has been instrumental in capturing the raw emotions and thoughts that accompany my experiences with body image. These methods have not only served as therapeutic self-exploration tools but have also allowed me to present a more intimate narrative to the audience based on my own bodily

experience. Simultaneously, being interviewed by others (mother and partner) has pushed me to articulate my journey with more vulnerability and introspection, providing audiences with a transparent view into my process of self-discovery and resistance against societal norms. This role reversal allowed me to critically reflect on my experiences and research process, highlighting the subjective nature of knowledge production that methodologies such as autotheory encourage. It embodies the principles of both autoethnography and autotheory, where the personal narrative is used as a lens through which broader cultural and societal phenomena are explored. On the other hand, the inclusion of historical footage and family archives in my research, like the analysis of scholarly articles, has provided a historical and cultural backdrop against which my personal story unfolds, highlighting the heavy influence of Brazilian beauty standards throughout my entire life.

To complement the self-reflexive aspects of my research, I have also conducted a series of interviews with my parents, grandmother, partner, the plastic surgeon who did my surgery, and a nurse who specializes in aesthetic surgery recovery for women. These followed a mostly conversational style, in which I was often present in the frame and actively participated and engaged with the subjects. The choice to include me in the interviews stems mostly from my desire to emphasize the self-reflexive nature of the documentary and research. This act acknowledges my role not just as a researcher but as an active participant in the cultural phenomena in question. In recognizing my participation, I am to demystify the research process, showing that it is not a detached or purely objective process but one deeply influenced by personal relationships and subjective experiences. Additionally, incorporating myself into the interviews, such as during the confrontation with my dad, allows me to more effectively illustrate how broader societal forces and aesthetic pressures are not abstract concepts but are lived and

felt on a personal level. This approach reinforces phenomenology's emphasis on lived experience as the primary source of knowledge and the auto-theoretical nature of my work. By being present and engaging directly with the subjects in these discussions, I can draw explicit connections between our personal experiences and the larger cultural and societal frameworks that shape those experiences, making the research process more accessible. It presents the research and storytelling process as a journey that I am actively navigating, inviting viewers to engage more intimately with the documentary. This method emphasizes empathy and understanding, as audiences are not just presented with abstract analyses or detached narratives, but are invited into a personal exploration of aesthetic pressure and body image in Brazil.

Although not all of the interviews were included in the documentary itself, they were fundamental in providing a generalized context of what beauty standards look like in Brazil and how they affect women in general, causing many of us to seek plastic surgery as a result. The interview with the plastic surgeon, for example, was fundamental in helping me understand the many nuances behind the high demand for plastic surgery in Brazil. In our conversations, Dr. Júlio Carlos Pereira argues that the increasing advertisement and banalization of aesthetic procedures on social media can have a dangerous impact when it comes to the patient's expectations regarding their surgery results. He mentions: "Plastic surgery isn't magic."[44] Because individuals almost exclusively see positive results online, they don't consider the potential negative consequences of the surgery, or expect that their result will be the same as the ones they saw online, often shared by influencers with a body type that already fits the beauty standards that the patients seek. However, because each body is different, the results of the surgery vary from patient to patient, and both doctors and patients need to navigate these

[44] Interview with Dr. Julio Carlos Pereira, August 2023.

expectations responsibly.[45] My interview with nurse and aesthetician Lucinha Mendes, who specializes in postoperative care for women who went through plastic surgery, further supports this claim. In the interview, she shares the story of one of her previous patients, who kept comparing herself and the results of her plastic surgery with the Brazilian influencer Virgínia Fonseca, claiming that her results did not look as good as Virgínia's and that the surgery was not as successful because her stomach and breasts didn't look "perfect" like the influencer's.[46]

Considering the personal scope of my documentary, I opted for only including the interviews with my parents in the final cut, to offer a multi-generational perspective that enriches the understanding of aesthetic pressure in Brazil by shedding light on how these standards have evolved and how they are transmitted through family dynamics. These in-depth interviews serve as a fundamental source of qualitative data, providing insights into the cultural and familial contexts that have shaped my perceptions and experiences with body image. My mother's narrative is particularly illuminating, revealing the gendered expectations placed on women's bodies and how these have been internalized and passed down through generations, with an emphasis on her own insecurity: her ears. By exploring her experiences, I aim to understand the lineage of aesthetic pressure within my own family, noting how societal ideals have influenced her self-image and, subsequently, the messages about beauty and body image that I received growing up. Her perspective offers a unique lens through which to view the shifting landscape of Brazilian beauty standards, highlighting how these pressures are not only a contemporary issue but are deeply rooted in historical and cultural practices. Through her story, I can trace the impact of aesthetic pressure across generations, providing a deeper context for my personal journey and the broader cultural dynamics at play.

[45]Ibid
[46] Interview with Lucinha Mendes, August 2023.

Similarly, interviewing my father allows for an exploration of the male perspective on aesthetic pressure and its impact on women. His insights reveal ways in which patriarchal structures and gender norms have influenced perceptions of beauty within my family and society at large, especially when relating to objectification theory. Our exchange also sheds light on how men perceive and contribute to the perpetuation of aesthetic pressures, offering a critical examination of the role of gender dynamics in shaping body image ideals. Going through the motions of making this documentary, doing research, and interviewing him helped me understand my insecurities were not exclusively his fault. After all, empirical research demonstrates that how a woman's body appears to others can determine her life experiences. "Studies have demonstrated, for instance, that obesity negatively affects women's, but not men's, social mobility, with obese women showing lower educational and economic attainments than their parents."[47] Now, I am sure that there are better ways to care for the ones you love other than body shaming them into losing weight, but villainizing my parents, in particular my dad, proved itself unhelpful and frustrating throughout the years because ultimately, their perceptions of my body are part of a much larger issue than my family nucleus, which led me to my attempt to understand their side of the story through my work.

On a separate note, throughout the development of the documentary I grappled with the decision of whether to include the results of my surgery. That was not an easy decision to make, as it involved a deep consideration of the documentary's objectives, the sensitivity of the subject matter, and the potential impact on the audience. While I invite viewers into the tangible aspects of my journey by showing footage of me at the hospital, highlighting the physical interventions

[47] Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (June 1997): 173–206, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x, 178.

that some may choose to go through in their paths toward self-acceptance and body autonomy, I consciously chose not to expose the final result of the surgery. This decision was rooted in a desire to shift the focus from the physical outcomes of the surgery to the emotional and psychological journey of confronting and navigating aesthetic pressures. It underscores the documentary's exploration of body image and self-love as processes that are not exclusively defined by physical transformations but are deeply internal and subjective experiences. By withholding the final result, I aim to challenge the audience's expectations and prompt them to reflect on the broader themes of the documentary, such as the societal obsession with physical appearance, the complexity of personal choices about one's body, and the nuanced nature of self-acceptance. This choice also relates to the feminist theoretical frameworks that support my documentary, which question the objectification of women's bodies and the commodification of beauty standards. Moreover, not displaying the final result aligns with the ethical considerations of my research and creative process. It respects my privacy and personal boundaries, aspects that are often crossed in media representations of body modifications, offering a more dignified approach to discussing and depicting body image issues.

Another aspect of my film I wish to speak to is the use of the beach landscape as a space for reflection. Going to the beach has always been one of my biggest triggers when it comes to body image. The thought of others seeing and judging my body and how I looked in a bikini often made staying at home or choosing to be uncomfortable due to wearing full clothes under the heat of Brazilian summer, safer options. Although it has gotten better throughout the years, my relationship with the beach is still a complicated one, and being able to “conquer” a bit of that space through the documentary has been liberating. In the film, my mom and I walk over the beach, each on our own journey, in search of a place to settle down. She comes out of the ocean

in an attempt to free herself from her insecurities and brings the chairs along as a symbol of the foundation she set for her daughter while navigating her insecurities by herself. In the meantime, I go through my own process, attempting to find my place. However, it is only when I begin to make peace with the different aspects that shape my perspective of my body that I can find the right path. Ultimately, this leads me to find my place beside my mom, sitting on the chair she set for me and marking the beginning of a more forgiving relationship with myself. Having this parallel storyline at the beach as I went through the motions of my research proved helpful as a way to navigate and visualize my introspective journey. Since the film and research were developed as my life unfolds, translating those real-life emotions into a more artistic and poetic expression through the fictionalized beach sequence helped me process this period of extreme change.

Lastly, the choice of working with an editor is also something that should be considered in my methodology. Throughout the development of my research, I have struggled with narrowing down the topics that should be included in the final documentary. I found myself drowning in an overwhelming amount of ideas and concepts I believed to be fundamental for developing a cohesive narrative that would thoroughly encompass every aspect of body image in Brazil in addition to my life's story and connection to the topic. Working with an editor (who is also my partner) was imperative for the development of the film because I was able to focus the scope of the narrative on something manageable and cohesive. Most important, however, is the fact that working with someone I am already familiar with and close to created a layer of protection between me and the often overwhelming footage. At times, I saw myself unable to work on the documentary due to the emotional load and trauma that the interviews and overall content brought forth, and having an editor beside me throughout the entire development process

(aside from resuming counselling with a mental health professional) was extremely helpful not only to the development of the documentary but to my wellbeing.

V - Conclusion

Overall, *This is a Story About Self-Love (and boobs)* is more than just a documentary; it is a deeply personal learning experience regarding the exploration of body image, aesthetic pressure, and the journey towards self-acceptance and forgiveness. Through the integration of autoethnography, autotheory, phenomenology, and objectification theory, I attempt to navigate the complex nuances of societal beauty standards in Brazil, using my own experiences as a way of expanding cultural and societal critiques. The methodologies and theoretical frameworks employed have not only allowed for a detailed understanding of aesthetic pressures but have also facilitated a reflexive and critical examination of my own experiences within this socio-cultural context.

By engaging in various forms of qualitative research, including personal storytelling and interviews with key figures in my life, I aim to illuminate the forces that shape women's perceptions of themselves and how we navigate external and self-objectification. It's essential to recognize that there is no right or wrong way to deal with aesthetic pressure. What matters is understanding the nuances and the impact of those various forces on our decisions. Whether or not to undergo plastic surgery is a personal choice, and it does not signify “losing the battle against patriarchy.” It can be a way to navigate the objectification we face, as avoiding it entirely is impossible. Nevertheless, understanding the social, political, and economic contexts of why

women self-objectify, develop poor body image, and seek plastic surgery as a result is something that should be taken into account when making decisions such as the one I did, in addition to considering the potential psychological and physical implications that undergoing invasive aesthetic procedures (and self-reflexive journeys) may bring. At this point, I do not believe that I am completely healed from my negative body image or that my journey in search of self-love is over. Putting myself through this process is just the beginning of a long path toward forgiveness I need to go through within myself.

Ultimately, I hope this documentary can stand as a demonstration of the power of personal narrative in interpreting societal norms and promoting a more forgiving and empathetic conversation about beauty standards, body image, and self-acceptance. I hope that by sharing my story, I can inspire others to embark on their journeys of self-discovery and to question the societal pressures that shape our perceptions of ourselves and others. In doing so, *This is a Story About Self-Love (and boobs)* goes beyond the personal, contributing to a larger discourse on the politics of the body when it comes to self-love.

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